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ABSTRACT

Historical, linguistic, cultural, and political variables are important in understanding the development and implementation of Milwaukee urban bilingual education programs, established in 1969 and including kindergarten through 12th grades at 11 elementary and 4 secondary schools. Hispanics comprise 6% of school enrollment (5,334 pupils, of whom over 2,200 are in bilingual programs) including students directly from Mexico and Puerto Rico; those who followed step migration from the Southwest, East, or other midwestern cities; and many born in Milwaukee who have limited English proficiency or whose parents desire them to become fully bilingual. Over 70% of Milwaukee's Hispanics reside in one of three areas in the city. Bilingual programs in neighborhood schools are seen as essential to building community pride. The history of other ethnic groups in some now predominantly Hispanic areas, and the image Milwaukeeans have of their city as an ethnic city of good will may affect support for bilingual programs. The black drive for educational equity has used various strategies to confront those who hold power and to gain resources for community programs; this, among other things, has led to growing consciousness and increasing cohesiveness in the Hispanic community which have made implementation of educational reform possible. (AW/MH)

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION COMMUNITY STUDY: IMPLEMENTING BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN AN URBAN MIDWESTERN CONTEXT

by

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The major purpose of the Bilingual Education Community Study is to describe the context - historical, linguistic, cultural, and political - in which two bilingual education programs have been initiated and implemented. Two very different sites were selected in order to explore programs and communities that reflect present Hispanic realities. One site, a small rural community in California, represents the conflicts and problems of community development which must address the needs of farm-workers and second and third generation Mexicans. The other site, a large midwestern city, reflects the growing sense of consciousness within Hispanic urban populations, and their desire to influence and control the services they need, including education. Bilingual education has been perceived by people in both communities as an important part of their efforts to improve community life and increase opportunities.

This paper focusses on some of the dimensions of the urban context. Since research is on-going, it is not a complete analysis of the issues, but rather an attempt to highlight community variables that are important in understanding the development and implementation of bilingual education programs in an urban context - Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

An overview of the program and its implementation

The bilingual program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin has been in existance for 12 years. It started in 1969 with a small effort at one school and has grown to a program that is being implemented in eleven elementary schools and four secondary schools. Federal funds assisted program initiation, but it is now supported by local and state funds. Hispanics make up 6% of the school enrollment or 5,334 pupils, of which over 2,200 are currently enrolled in bilingual programs.

Students include newcomers who have come directly from Mexico or Puerto Rico, and others who have followed a step migration pattern and come by way of the Southwest, the East, or other midwestern cities. Many students born in Milwaukee are also in the program, some because of limited English proficiency and some because of parental desire to have them become fully bilingual and biliterate. From its inception, the program model was to span kindergarten to twelfth grade, and was called a "developmental program." Placement preference is given to students with limited proficiency in English.

Program expansion was designed to be gradual, following a grade a year approach. This lead to some conflict with community advocates, but it also enabled the program to face the problems of size. Although Milwaukee with about 682,000 inhabitants is not Los Angeles, and the Latin population is much smaller, only 26,000, program implementation must face some similar problems - recruitment of a large staff (Milwaukee has over 100 teachers and 87 paraprofessionals), training for staff, teacher placement which avoids confrontation with the teacher's union, and the need to get cooperation from many building principals. In addition, race desegregation issues needed to be addressed in ways that protected programs without pitting blacks and Hispanics against one another. Community strategies for change have utilized both confrontation and cooperation, since little power is in the hands of Hispanics. There has never been an Hispanic school board member or locally elected city councilman.

Successful program expansion has been due to a combination of factors:

1. an educated, dedicated, small group of community organizers committed to identifying and training parent advocates for bilingual education,

2. non-Hispanic school administrator, committed and knowledgable about bilingual education, who played a broker role in advocating for the program within the administration and the board, and who remained the administrator for ten years,

3. a few liberal school board members who responded at key times to the demands of community advocates for program expansion, and

4. the availability of state funding for 70% of the costs for limited proficiency students.

Program Initiation

Hispanics concerned with bilingual education as a way to reform education were able to capitalize on the civil rights movement activities of the 1960's in Milwaukee which included marches and protests by blacks and Hispanics around issues of discrimination in housing and employment, access to higher education, and control over resources to serve health and social needs. Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, in the early 1970's, won some key battles for change, and there was greater awareness that collective action could be successful. Bilingual education played an important symbolic role in this fight for recognition and respect. When community wide events, such as the Mexican Independence Day Parade, were re-established by second generation Hispanics, bilingual program students and staff marched as part of a new symbolic ethnicity. Both concern about high school drop-outs and language maintainance was expressed.

Migration History

Mexicans had been coming to Milwaukee since the 1850's, some leaving migrant life, some recruited directly by the industries that continue to make-up the Southside's Industrial Valley. Others began to come because their families were there and because there were jobs. The two peak periods of Puerto Rican migration were in the 1950's and 1970's. A similar pattern was followed, including step migration from the East

and Midwest. It should be noted that Chicago, which is less than two hours away, has had a growing Hispanic population. Today over 400,000 Hispanics live there, an increase of over 78% in the last decade. By 1978 there were over 12,308 Puerto Ricans in Milwaukee, about half of the Latin population. Visiting relatives in Puerto Rico, Mexico and Texas continues, and relatives come to the city for months at a time, if not permanently.

This continuing influx of families, many of whom speak primarily Spanish, has meant that language use in the community continues to be bilingual. The schools can expect about 400 limited English speakers a year. In an evaluation done by the district in 1979, parents with children in the bilingual classes studied indicated their language dominance - over 40% said they were Spanish dominant, slightly fewer said they were bilingual, and about 16% said they were English dominant. The younger the child in the program, the more Spanish dominant he or she was.

The Ethnic Enclave

Although not as segregated as the black population, over 70% of Milwaukee's Hispanics reside in three areas, the South, Northeast and West. More than 50% or approximately 13,000, live on the Southside. While many thousand Puerto Ricans live there also, it is a predominately Mexican community, and has been perceived as a Mexican area since the 1920's. Referred to as Walker's Point, or the Near Southside, this has been Milwaukee's port of entry for immigrants since the beginning of industrialization in the late nineteenth century. Primarily a manufactoring city, Milwaukee's foundaries, steel plants, tanneries and other heavy industries remain clustered in the Industrial Valley which is within walking distance for many Hispanics. In some of the factories, over 50% of the workforce is Hispanic, and a survey indicated

that there are over 64 bilingual supervisors in these factories. Incomes are low.

Nearby can be found the two churches with the largest Hispanic membership, and a number of small businesses, increasingly owned by Hispanics, which provide places where people can speak Spanish - groceries, a gift and record store, a pharmacy, restaurants, and taverns. Also found within the area are social service agencies with bilingual staff, and a community center serving over 800 families. There will soon be a bank with a bilingual manager and staff.

While there is some movement further South and West, mobility for Hispanics remain primarily within the barrios themselves. There are efforts to revitalize the Southside area and rezone it. The existance of bilingual programs in neighborhood schools is seen as essential to the effort to build community pride.

The Non-Hispanic Community

People living on the Southside represent a mixture of nationalities and languages - Germans, Greeks, Serbs, Croations, Ukranians, Poles, and others. The area is still considered to be predominately Polish and working class. Oldtimers still speak their native languages, as do some of the newer immigrants. Many came as a result of World War II. Others can understand, but no longer speak these languages. There is an attachment to the area, though some have moved away in order to buy houses in the suburbs. Others have remained and continue their membership in ethnic organizations and churches in the area.

Prior to World War I, Milwaukee provided major public and private support for the maintainance of language and ethnicity. Public schools offered instruction through German, Polish and Italian, and there were many foreign language newspapers.

For the most part, ethnic neighborhoods have persisted, and there is a vast network of social and voluntary organizations that support ethnic identity. Churches continue to reinforce cultural traditions. Public celebrations of ethnicity are seen as not only appropriate, but part of the image that Milwaukeeans wish to portray of themselves.

As the neighborhood on the Southside began to change, there were tensions and discrimination. It is likely that the tensions played a part in the changing demographics of the area, although the movement of some churches, urban renewal, and upward mobility also affect movement of non-Hispanics out of the area. Non-Hispanics still belong to the churches and attend the schools in the area, although these are becoming majority Hispanic. There is contact in the workplace, and 20% of the families belonging to the community center are non-Hispanic. There is a growing number of intermarriages.

Support for one's own ethnicity does not necessarily get translated into support to spend public funds to help Hispanics maintain their language and culture. While there is a "live and let live" attitude on the part of many people, some feel that they were able to survive without bilingual programs and do not support them for Hispanics. Others support bilingual programs, but may not support the maintainance approach. Still others have enrolled their children in the three language immersion programs in the city which teach content through Spanish, German and French.

As a whole, Milwaukeeans have a positive attitude towards their city. A city has an image, a cultural and symbolic reality. It is a social creation, and while this means that it reflects the racial and class distinctions of the inhabitants, usually geographically divided by freeways and thoroughfares, it also can reflect

the willingness of people to welcome newcomers. Milwaukeeans see their city as an ethnic city, a city of good will, a hard working city and a friendly place. It is a city of parks, taverns, and churches. This pride in the city has meant that some people of good will have tried to assist newcomers, while others have attempted to resolve conflicts to keep the peace and the good image.

Accomodation has been a part of the city's history, Unlike other parts of the country, there is no long history of conflict and exploitation between Hispanics and "Anglos". Most people see themselves as Greeks, Germans, or Poles rather than "Anglos" and they too are or have been primarily working class. This does not mean a lack of discrimination, but it does allow for some adaptation to ethnic and linguistic diversity. Race, however, is another matter.

The Black Drive for Educational Equity

The 16th Street bridge connecting the Southside with downtown has been called the longest bridge in the world, because it is said to connect Poland and Africa. This bit of local humor reflects an underlying concern about the growth of the black population in the city and its segregation.

For the last fourteen years Milwaukee has been struggling with race desegregation issues. Blacks, who came in large numbers around World War II, have been very segregated. Between 1950 and 1970 the black population increased by 500%, and presently black students make up over 45% of the school population. The white suburbs also grew during this period as did the city's Hispanic population.

A desegregation suit was filed against the school district in 1965 and a settlement was not reached until 1979. Thanks to some educational leadership and an infusion of federal and state money, desegregation has been peaceful and more

successful than in other parts of the country in terms of the mixing of white and black students. Hispanics tried to intervene in the court case, but were not allowed to do so. They were concerned that bilingual programs would be destroyed by the movement of students and staff without consideration for bilingual programs. According to the court, they were "non-black" and could therefore be used to integrate schools; however, the court decided to exempt those schools with the largest Hispanic enrollments from the plan and asked the administration to consider bilingual education in their planning. Much effort on the part of community activists was expended during the critical moments of this case.

While there have been disagreements between Hispanics and blacks over educational reform, there have also been times of collaboration and coalition building. Hispanics and blacks have served together on community wide groups concerned with educational and social welfare issues, and recently further collaboration has taken place on the issue of school closings. Some black teachers work in Hispanic schools, and some black community leaders have learned about bilingual education and support it. A small number of black parents have voluntarily enrolled their children in bilingual programs for Hispanics, and also have enrolled students in the language immersion programs.

As to be expected given the realities of racism in America, blacks tend to see race as a more significant issue than language when it comes to discrimination by whites. Even within the Hispanic population they feel that this is true, and many Hispanics might agree. One black leader put it this way: "the darker the complexion, the rougher the treatment." Competition for resources has existed between the two groups and is expected to increase.

Conclusion

In order to understand the historical, political, cultural and linguistic

context of bilingual education in the Midwest, it is necessary to examine the migration patterns of the major groups and their adaptation to the urban environment and to explore how events of recent decades have fostered a growing consciousness and cohesion which has made the implementation of educational reform possible.

Earlier adaptation patterns were similar to that of other ethnic groups in cities. People came because of labor recruitment as well as because they heard about jobs from friends and family members. They lived in the industrial areas of cities, established churches with services in their native languages, and set up mutual aid associations. Culture and traditions were maintained in ethnic enclaves, many of which continue to exist in our cities for several ethno-linguistic groups.

In recent years, Hispanics have realized that they were not benefiting equally from the institutions in their communities. They saw that they were still stuck in the lowest paying jobs, and that they were unable to move as rapidly as other groups into better housing and better jobs. They also saw that blacks had utilized various strategies to confront those who held the power, and to gain resources to administer programs for their communities. They also began to march for equality.

Bilingual education provided a way to improve the education for newcomers who spoke only Spanish as well as to provide greater cohesiveness and pride to the second generation Hispanics who felt that they had to give up much but did not gain so much in return. While they had learned English, school success and economic and political success did not follow. It built bridges between those who had gained further education and those who had not been able to do so, between the poor and unskilled and some of those who were becoming professionals. It is another form of community adaptation to the urban environment.